THE ELEEMOSYNARY IN THE YORK RITE

(Preston/Webb or American Rite)

More Than a Collector of Alms

The office of the Eleemosynary, sometimes known as the Almoner or Hospitaller, is too often reduced to the simple task of collecting funds for charity. We must insist from the outset that this role involves duties far more extensive and delicate than merely managing the charitable treasury for which he is responsible. The Eleemosynary is the cement of a Lodge.

In practice, the Eleemosynary is the living embodiment of benevolence and solidarity within the Lodge. While Grand Lodge constitutions or Lodge by-laws may offer only brief or incomplete descriptions of this officer's duties, his true work is found in the dedicated, practical application of Masonic charity. This chapter will describe in detail the charges and responsibilities he must assume.

His Place and Jewel

In many Masonic traditions and jurisdictions, the Eleemosynary is seated in the northeast of the Lodge room. From this station, he departs to perform one of his most visible duties: "*taking up the collection*" for the relief of distressed worthy Brethren.

His jewel of office is a powerful emblem of his duties: a purse, often adorned with a heart, suspended from his collar. This jewel is a near-universal symbol of goodness, generosity, mutual aid, compassion, and altruistic charity. Unfortunately, the profound symbolism of the Heart is not often studied in our Lodges.

The Implied Duties of the Heart

If a Brother were to contemplate the symbolism of this jewel, he would quickly understand that his duties extend far beyond financial bookkeeping. The heart on his jewel implicitly charges him with two other essential functions:

1. **Guardian of Our Brothers' Well-Being:** It is his duty to keep the Lodge informed of the health and condition of its members, particularly those who are elderly, infirm, or live at a great distance. He is the Lodge’s primary point of contact for Brethren who are ill and confined to their beds.
2. **A Brother to the Absent:** It is also his charge to inquire into the reasons why Brethren have been absent for a long time without communication, and no longer attend Lodge meetings.

These crucial functions, though often overlooked in official regulations, are implicitly contained within the cardiac symbolism of the Eleemosynary’s jewel.

The Character of the Office

Naturally, these duties demand an officer who is a true "man of heart". He must possess an exemplary and natural sense of fraternity, combined with a generous availability to his Brethren and an irreproachable honesty in the management of all charitable funds.

The Tools of Charity

While the heart of the Eleemosynary’s work is spiritual, his duties involve a physical and concrete attribute: the vessel used to collect the Lodge’s charitable offerings.

Across different Masonic rites, this tool takes several forms. In some European traditions, a "Widow's Trunk" is used—often a black wooden or metal box, which may be square or triangular. The inside is sometimes lined with felt or velvet to soften the sound of the coins as they are deposited. More common in other rites is the use of a deep charity bag. This is typically a cloth bag, which may be decorated with a red heart or the letter “B” for Benevolence, a form considered by many to be rich in symbolism.

For practical purposes in larger Lodge rooms, it is also common to see collection pouches made of velvet, with a metal frame attached to a horizontal handle. The handle’s purpose is to allow the Eleemosynary to easily reach Brethren seated in the back rows without having to lean forward excessively.

The Method of Collection

When the Eleemosynary proceeds to collect the alms, there is a proper form to be observed, though it is often forgotten. As he is standing and moving about the Lodge to perform this solemn duty, he holds the charity box or bag in his left hand, while his right hand should be held at the proper sign of order.

The Symbolism of the Gift

Regardless of its shape, the symbolism of the collection vessel is linked to the heart. Once filled, the contents represent a tangible sum of money, but it is much more than that. This collection is the Lodge's collective generosity given form, and it must never be considered as coming from "hearts of stone". On the contrary, it is a precious offering whose primary destination is to provide aid to Masons in proven financial distress, as well as to support their Lodges and other Masonic charities.

The Threefold Office

In summary, the complete office of the Eleemosynary is composed of three distinct, yet related, kinds of activity:

- The management of his treasury.
- Humanitarian care and outreach to the sick.
- Fraternal interest and concern for chronically absent Brethren.

While official regulations often focus almost exclusively on the first activity—the financial one—it is in the masterful practice of all three that an Eleemosynary truly fulfills his vital role in the Lodge.

Stewardship and the Collection of Alms

The Management of the Charity Fund

The financial duties of the Eleemosynary are governed by the specific Rite and Grand Lodge regulations under which his Lodge operates, yet a set of core principles defines this sacred trust across the Masonic world. The Eleemosynary is the designated custodian of all funds and assets collected for the express purpose of charity. It is a foundational tenet that this

charity fund is held entirely independent of the Lodge's general treasury, which is the domain of the Treasurer. The funds entrusted to the Eleemosynary are destined exclusively for the relief of worthy Brethren in distress.

While the Lodge may vote on certain disbursements, immediate aid is typically distributed by the Eleemosynary upon the direct instruction and authority of the

Worshipful Master. To underscore this shared responsibility, some traditions secure the alms box with two different keys—one held by the Master and the other by the Eleemosynary—ensuring that funds cannot be accessed without mutual consent. The Eleemosynary is fully accountable to the Master and the Lodge's leadership for the proper use of these funds. He must be prepared to give a report on the state of the treasury whenever asked and is responsible for preparing a final balance of his accounts before the annual election of officers. In some jurisdictions, his duties may also extend to the administration and recovery of any charitable loans the Lodge has granted to its members.

This model of stewardship is not unique to one Masonic tradition. It mirrors the duties of the

Charity Steward found in the English Emulation Rite, an officer who is likewise charged with managing the funds of benevolence while also visiting the sick and absent and reporting on their condition to the Lodge.

The Practice of the Collection

The manner in which charity is collected is itself a matter of custom and solemnity, generally guided by two considerations: when the collection should occur and the method by which it is performed.

As a general rule, the circulation of the charity box is conducted during a meeting held in the **first degree**, or Entered Apprentice Lodge. This custom ensures that the maximum number of Brethren are present and have the opportunity to contribute to the relief of those less fortunate. It is also a widely held tradition that alms are not collected during Festive Boards, Masonic funeral services, or other special, non-ritualistic ceremonies.

Two primary methods are used for the collection itself. The most familiar is the **circulation** of the alms box, wherein the Eleemosynary ambulates around the Lodge room to present the box to each Brother individually. A second and noteworthy method is the **static collection** at the Lodge room door. In this practice, the Eleemosynary does not circulate the box during the meeting. Instead, he stands at his station near the door after the Lodge has been formally closed, and the Brethren deposit their offerings as they depart. Proponents of this method argue that the collection of money, while an indispensable duty, is a "material" act that can disrupt the unique harmony and spiritual atmosphere of a tyled Lodge. By conducting the collection after the sacred ritual is complete, the solemnity of the Lodge's work is preserved without neglecting the fundamental Masonic tenet of charity

Ensuring Universal Charity

A fundamental question for any Lodge is how to ensure that the vital duty of charity is upheld by all its members, not just by those who are able to be physically present at every meeting. The spirit of Masonic relief is universal, intended to be the shared work of every Brother on the roster. Masonic history and custom offer some profound and practical examples of how this principle has been put into action.

A Lesson from History: The Attendance Token

Looking back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Masonic historians note that Lodge charity funds were often more substantial than they are today. A significant reason for this was an ingenious system known as the "attendance token" (*jeton de présence*), which guaranteed that charity was an act performed by every single registered member of the Lodge, whether present or absent.

The system, though it was not practiced in all Lodges, generally consisted of each Brother purchasing a set of tokens from the charity fund at the beginning of the Masonic year. The number of tokens purchased was equal to the number of meetings planned for that year. These tokens were often custom-made metal coins, struck with the name and seal of the Lodge, and their value was voted upon by the members annually. When a Brother attended a meeting, he made his usual voluntary offering into the charity box. If he was absent, however, the token he had already paid for served as his contribution, meaning he had no need to ask a Brother to make a donation in his name. At the end of the year, attending members could be reimbursed for the tokens they held, but the value of the tokens corresponding to any missed meetings was retained by the charity fund.

A Fraternal Custom: The Collection for the Excused

In addition to the familiar circulation of the charity box near the end of a meeting, some Masonic traditions practice a second collection that takes place at the beginning. This collection occurs during a specific point in the opening business of the Lodge: the presentation of excuses for absent Brethren.

The execution of this custom is both simple and profound. As a Brother rises to request that the Lodge grant an excuse for an absent member, the Eleemosynary, often preceded by the Master of Ceremonies, also rises and approaches the speaker to collect an offering made on the absent Brother's behalf. This is done at the very moment the excuse is offered. Collecting the alms concurrently with the excuses is a practical measure, as it prevents the Eleemosynary from having to commit the details to memory and possibly forgetting who spoke for whom later in the meeting. More importantly, this custom powerfully links the fraternal courtesy of offering a Brother's excuse with the Masonic obligation of charity, reinforcing the idea that no Brother is ever truly absent from his duties.

Decorum, Duty, and the Path of Charity

Maintaining Solemnity During the Collection

The collection of alms should be one of the most solemn and reflective moments of a Lodge meeting. It is frequently observed, however, that the circulation of the charity box can become a signal for whispering, side conversations, and the distracting sounds of members opening wallets and briefcases. This noise can disrupt the harmony and focus that the Lodge has worked to establish.

When such a disturbance occurs, it is often a symptom of other issues within the Lodge. The cause may be a general lack of interest in the Masonic work being presented, tensions arising from contentious or political discussions, or simply an excessively long meeting that has run late and tried the patience of the Brethren. Whatever the reason for the clamor, the Worshipful Master and the Wardens have a solemn duty to gently calm the Lodge and restore its quiet dignity.

The physical path the Eleemosynary walks while performing this duty—his ambulation—differs according to the specific rite and the customs of the jurisdiction. While some traditions prescribe complex and lengthy routes, the universal principle is that of a dignified and orderly circulation. For Lodges with a very large attendance, the collection can be performed more efficiently by having the Assistant Eleemosynary circulate a second charity box, ensuring that the time dedicated to this duty is not unduly long.

Addressing Further Charitable Business

In some European Masonic rites, there is a formal ritual exchange after the collection is complete where the Master asks if any Brother "claims" the charity box. While this specific language may not be part of the Preston/Webb working, the reasons for such a "claim" represent situations that can and do arise in any Lodge. It is therefore useful to understand the purpose behind this old custom and the proper procedure for addressing such matters.

There are two primary reasons why a Brother might need to address the Lodge regarding the charity collection after it has already been completed. The first is personal: a Brother may have forgotten to

make his offering, been unable to find his money when the box passed him, or he may be moved to increase the amount he has already given. The second reason is procedural: a Brother may intend to propose that the entire collection from that evening be dedicated to a specific Masonic or non-Masonic charitable cause.

In either case, the Brother should seek permission to speak from the presiding Warden at an appropriate time, rise, and address the Worshipful Master, stating his purpose. If his intention is to make or add to a personal donation, the Master would direct the Eleemosynary to approach the Brother and receive his offering. If the Brother is making a motion to direct the funds to a particular cause, that motion would be discussed by the Brethren and put to a vote, following the Lodge's established rules of order. This ensures that even after the formal circulation is finished, the avenues for practicing charity remain open to all.

Accounting for Charity: From Collection to Ledger

Securing and Tallying the Collection

After the circulation is complete, the Eleemosynary proceeds to the East by the northern path to present the charity box at the pedestal of the Worshipful Master. What follows is a crucial process of verification and accounting, for which there can be only one guiding principle: that it must be done with reverence and without disrupting the work of the Lodge.

In some Masonic traditions, the process of counting the collection is performed immediately, obliging the officer to tally coins and bills during the meeting itself. This practice, however, can be a noisy and brief activity that is entirely incompatible with the quiet dignity and spiritual focus of a tyled Lodge. The far preferable method, which should be considered a best practice, is for all counting and recording operations to be conducted immediately after the Lodge has been closed.

Once the meeting is concluded, the Master should declare that the contents of the charity box will be counted and verified, the amount officially recorded by the Secretary, and the funds then taken in charge by the Eleemosynary. This counting should be overseen by at least two officers, typically the Eleemosynary and the Secretary, to ensure accuracy and accountability. Before departing, the Eleemosynary should ensure the Secretary has the final amount for inclusion in the Lodge's records.

Income and Expenditures

The Eleemosynary must be conscious that his accounting is the tangible record of the Lodge's charity, and it must be maintained with scrupulous care in a dedicated register. This ledger will track all income and expenditures, showing the balance of the fund at any given time.

The income, or receipts, for the charity fund are composed of several streams. The primary source is, of course, the regular proceeds from the charity box collections. This may be supplemented by sporadic, unsolicited donations from individual members of the Lodge , as well as by special donations received from other Lodges who are answering a call for solidarity. Some Lodges also choose to augment their charity funds by adding a slight supplement to the standard fees paid by candidates for initiation, passing, and raising.

The expenditures from the fund consist of all relief distributed by the Lodge. This includes emergency aid granted to members to help cover unforeseen costs, such as expensive medical procedures or funeral expenses. It may also cover the cost of flowers sent in case of the death of a member or their spouse, or be used to pay the annual dues for a Brother who has fallen into financial hardship. The list of potential needs is long. Expenditures also include any interest-free, repayable loans that are granted to members of the Lodge. These loans necessitate a separate "register of benevolence," or at least a distinct section in the ledger, where the agreed-upon repayment terms and all reimbursements are carefully recorded.

For legal and accounting purposes, the charity fund should be treated as a distinct entity. Although it is part of the Lodge's overall financial structure , the funds for solidarity must appear in the Lodge's books as separate lines for both income and expenses. By this method, the two treasuries—the general fund and the charity fund—remain clearly and distinctly separated, ensuring transparency and accuracy.

The Prudent Growth of Charitable Funds

A key distinction between a Lodge's general operating fund and its charity fund is the possibility of making the latter grow through investment. Rather than allowing a substantial amount of money to lie dormant, many Lodges choose to deposit their charity funds into an account that earns annual interest. Some may even pursue more lucrative, yet prudent, investment strategies.

However, a critical word of caution is necessary. It is immoral, in a Masonic sense, for large sums of charitable money to be kept "fructifying in dormancy" in financial products without being used to benefit someone or something in need. The purpose of the fund is relief, not the accumulation of wealth for its own sake.

Should a Lodge choose to invest its funds, a special register must be maintained by the Eleemosynary, recording the amounts invested and any interest capitalized. This requires regular and diligent cooperation between the Eleemosynary and the Treasurer. Typically, the Treasurer, having signature authority, is the one who handles the physical deposit of collections into the financial institution. He must, in turn, provide the Eleemosynary with the deposit records without delay so the charity ledger can be kept perfectly up to date.

Oversight, Discretion, and the Compassionate Work of Relief

A System of Checks and Balances: The Relief Committee

As we have seen, the Eleemosynary, in his function as a record-keeper, is not the sole person responsible for the charity fund. The receipts and especially the expenditures of this fund are controlled by other members of the Lodge, with the Worshipful Master having ultimate authority. While the specific methods of control may vary, a system of checks and balances is essential to the integrity of the Lodge’s charitable work.

In many Masonic jurisdictions, this oversight is formalized through a **Relief Committee** or a similar body charged with supervising the Lodge’s benevolence. Though practices vary, this committee is typically chaired by the Worshipful Master and includes other key officers and appointed Master Masons, such as the Lodge’s auditors, with the Eleemosynary serving as a key member. This body

should meet periodically—perhaps a few times a year in a small Lodge, or more frequently if needed—to carry out its duties. It should be viewed not as a tribunal of inquisitors, but as a team of advisors ready to support the Eleemosynary in his important tasks.

The committee's primary function is to carefully consider all requests for assistance. It also monitors the Lodge’s charitable income; if collections are consistently low, the committee may charge the Worshipful Master or the Eleemosynary with making an appeal to the Brethren for greater generosity. Furthermore, the committee can propose that a future collection be dedicated to a specific external charity, a proposition which must be announced and voted upon in open Lodge. Above all, the committee is responsible for verifying the Eleemosynary's ledgers. These records must be kept with absolute clarity, as any "artistic vagueness" in accounting can breed suspicion and division, which are intolerable in Freemasonry. A newly elected Eleemosynary has the right to modify the bookkeeping system for the sake of greater transparency, but should do so only with the consent of the Worshipful Master.

The Compassionate Process of Granting Aid

The manner in which relief is requested and granted is a measure of a Lodge's heart. Requests for assistance usually arrive at the Worshipful Master, either orally or in writing, though they may also be transmitted through the Eleemosynary or any other member of the committee.

It is a sensitive truth, however, that requests for aid are not always expressed by the Brothers in need themselves, often due to a discreet or proud temperament. In such instances, it becomes the solemn duty of any member of the Lodge who is aware of a Brother's particular financial struggles to bring the situation to the committee's attention, explaining the reasons why aid should be considered. After a thorough and compassionate discussion, the committee decides whether to grant the assistance and, if the decision is positive, determines the appropriate amount of the relief. In the practical administration of these funds, the Eleemosynary, along with the Worshipful Master and Treasurer, often has the authority to sign checks on behalf of the Lodge's charity fund.

The Unbreakable Bond of Discretion

The entire process of Masonic charity is shielded by the principle of **absolute discretion**. With the exception of the members of the Relief Committee, no other Brother in the Lodge should be made aware of the specific details of the charity fund's transactions. All relief is given and received in the strictest confidence.

Following this principle, the Eleemosynary’s periodic report to the Lodge should be a simple imitation of the Treasurer's report. He should present only three global figures: the total of all funds received, the total of all funds disbursed, and the resulting balance. No member of the Lodge, either in or out of the Lodge room, may ask the officer for additional details or specifics. To do otherwise would be an insult to the integrity of the committee and, more importantly, a violation of the sacred trust that protects the dignity of every Brother.

Fraternal Visitation

Beyond the careful stewardship of the charity fund, we now turn to the other two duties of the Eleemosynary, which are entirely different in nature. These are the delicate charges of visiting those Brethren who are suffering, as well as reaching out to those who have been absent from our meetings for three to six months, and sometimes much longer. This work requires great sensitivity, and it is upon these duties that we will now offer some counsel.

Visiting the Sick and Distressed

When a Brother is experiencing pain, whether in his body or in his spirit, it would be an inhumane failure of our principles not to visit him from time to time. These visits may take place wherever he resides: at his home, in a hospital or clinic, a nursing home, a rehabilitation center, or even a psychiatric or long-term care facility where he may be living out his final days. We should also not forget to visit and celebrate with a Brother's family upon the happy occasion of the birth of a child. For obvious reasons, all such visits should be scheduled in advance with a telephone call from the Eleemosynary.

For visits to a Brother’s home, the Eleemosynary must have sufficient knowledge of the family to know if his presence will be accepted. It sometimes happens that a Brother is the only Freemason in his family, and his loved ones may harbor a degree of mistrust towards the Craft. In a case of outright hostility, it is far better to send the suffering Brother a heartfelt card or letter signed by the members of the Lodge, expressing wishes for a speedy recovery. When visiting a hospital, one must be careful to avoid mealtimes, hours when nursing care is given, and the times when doctors are making their rounds. For new mothers, a gift of flowers, treats, or clothing for the new baby is a naturally sensitive gesture.

Evidently, the most somber visits, when not prohibited by doctors, are to geriatric centers or psychiatric facilities, especially when the Brother is bedridden or his mental state is severely compromised. In these circumstances, it is wise to space out the visits and to inquire with the caregivers about the evolution of these profound afflictions. Common sense health precautions must also be observed. One should avoid visiting Brethren with highly contagious diseases, but one should not hesitate to visit those with other conditions, provided that all prescribed safety measures are followed. If a facility requires that a visitor wear a mask and gown, these must be worn throughout the visit to protect the health of the patient.

Finally, the Eleemosynary does not have an exclusive monopoly on these visits. The Worshipful Master, or any Brother who is a particularly close friend or neighbor of the one who is ill, has an absolute right to visit. However, all visitors should coordinate with the Eleemosynary to avoid an excess of company that might fatigue the patient.

Reaching Out to the Absent Brother

In many Lodges, unjustified absenteeism is a persistent affliction that can affect ten to twenty percent of the membership. Beyond those who are absent for known health reasons, those Brethren who are in good health but who stop attending meetings without explanation deserve an inquiry from the officers, and from the Eleemosynary in particular, regarding their prolonged silence.

The reasons for this are numerous and each presents a specific problem. A Brother may live a great distance from the Lodge, be deterred by winter weather, or overwhelmed by his professional life. He may have lost interest in the Lodge's educational programs, or be struggling with personal matters like a separation or divorce, or a death in the family. Worst of all, his absence may be motivated by a deep antipathy or hatred towards another member of the Lodge.

The decision to visit a chronically absent Brother must be a collective one, made by the Lodge's leadership. Given the varied relationships between members, it is possible that one or more Brethren may already have information regarding the reason for a specific absence. This knowledge will enlighten the leadership on two points: the appropriateness of a visit, and the best way to engage in conversation if a visit is deemed necessary.

As incredible as it may seem, a visit is sometimes useless. This occurs when an absent Brother has formally told another member that he refuses to receive anyone from the Lodge who intends to persuade him to return. This is a sad and disappointing outcome, and one that the Lodge leadership must reflect on with great care, as the Lodge itself may be partly responsible for the refusal. It may be that during a discussion following a paper presented by that Brother, his ideas were met with such contradiction and intolerance that he could no longer bear to attend. Should an analysis of the situation conclude that this was the case, it represents a failure on the part of certain members, and a failure of the Worshipful Master and his officers to properly moderate the debate. In such a case, the Master has an imperious duty to send a letter to the absent Brother in which he acknowledges the error on behalf of the entire Lodge. Following such a purely Masonic initiative, there is hope that the Brother may reconsider his withdrawal. If not, his departure from the Lodge is, alas, likely inevitable

The Delicate Art of Reclamation

When the Lodge leadership is left to speculate on the reason for a Brother's absence because he has not confided in anyone, it falls to the Worshipful Master, even more so than the Eleemosynary, to "go to the coalface," with fraternity in his heart and on his lips. The chances of a definitive return may be slim, but they exist. The effectiveness of any outreach is directly linked to the underlying cause of the absenteeism, and so we shall examine the principal causes one by one.

Addressing Practical Obstacles

Sometimes, the reasons for a Brother's absence are purely practical. For a member who must travel a long distance to attend Lodge, or who fears the hazards of winter weather, the purpose of a visit can be to make a simple and generous offer: to arrange for him to be picked up and driven home for each meeting, or even for every other meeting. This can be accomplished through the kindness of a Brother who lives nearby or who has a reliable vehicle. It is rare that such a thoughtful proposition is refused.

Another common reason is an excess of professional and personal activities. When this is the case, the visiting officer must employ a degree of psychology—a skill that should be the hallmark of every Master Mason. The visitor must first help the absent Brother understand that Freemasonry is not an occupation like the others, simply added on top of his work, family obligations, and other social, cultural, or recreational commitments. Every Brother should be made aware upon his admission that his busy schedule will need to undergo a rebalancing, forcing him to make difficult choices and drastic

eliminations, without, of course, touching upon his essential duties to his profession and family. If the Brother is struggling to master his own schedule, the visiting officer should try to help him with suggestions, working with him to separate the indispensable from the superfluous. In most cases, after one or more such conversations, the absent Brother will find a way to become an active member once more.

Navigating Matters of the Heart

Some situations are far more delicate. A Brother may not dare to admit that his spouse prevents him from going to Lodge—perhaps because she, being a profane, curses his absence from the home two or three evenings a month. This is the most delicate situation of all. The visiting officer, taking care not to become a homewrecker, cannot solve this problem for the Brother. He can, however, provide the Brother with simple arguments capable of encouraging a degree of permissiveness from the spouse. The argument is this: as Freemasonry is a moral Order, its members—if they are truly working to polish their rough ashlar—can only improve their relationships with their family and love them more intensely than before. The time spent in nocturnal meetings should not be seen as an "abandonment of the home," and the family of a Mason should, on the contrary, rejoice to have such a person in their midst.

Emotional setbacks, such as a separation or divorce, and family tragedies, such as a death, also pose extremely delicate problems. Here, the mission of the visiting officers is to surround the Brother with the affection of the Lodge and encourage him to participate once again in the meetings, with the clear intention of helping him break his voluntary isolation from time to time. In the case of a bereavement, the success of the visits often depends on the depth of the emotional capital the Brother had invested in the person he has lost; the unexpected death of a spouse is a far more painful blow than that of a father who has been ill for a long time. For all Brothers who have been emotionally overwhelmed, it is a salutary practice, upon their return to Lodge, to give them responsibilities: ask them to present a paper, appoint them to a committee, or entrust them with a duty. At first, these activities may be mere palliatives, but in time, they will help the Brother to regain his footing and master his grief.

Healing Discord Within the Lodge

Sometimes, a Brother’s absence is motivated by a disinterest in the Lodge’s work, perhaps because it has become too preoccupied with profane matters like politics and social issues, or because it has become the opposite: too ritualistic and traditionalist, to the exclusion of all else. This is often the fault of an authoritarian Master or leadership team whose approach does not meet the needs of the entire assembly. After hearing such complaints during his visits, the Eleemosynary has a duty to advocate for a rebalancing of the Lodge’s future programs. Once he has succeeded, he must inform the absent members of the new programming and ask them to return.

We must now address the prolonged absence motivated by a Brother’s antipathy toward one or more of his peers. This anti-fraternal attitude is, to repeat, the most execrable case that can exist in Masonry. The arguments to be used depend on the cause of the resentment, whether it stems from dishonest acts, a dissolute lifestyle, mockery, or repeated aggression. Regardless, the visiting officers must do everything in their power, in the name of that union of which Freemasonry declares itself to be the center, to persuade the Brother to reconsider his decision. At the same time, they must also speak with

the Brother or Brothers who have caused the antipathy. A positive result is not guaranteed, but it is better to "lance the boil" than to let it grow.

Special Visits and Final Duties

While the above examples are common, more complicated situations involving issues like racism or political confrontation require an even greater level of psychological competence to be handled favorably. A final, delicate case illustrates the depth of Masonic charity: that of a Brother in pre-trial detention. As long as the Brother’s guilt has not been formally established, he is, according to profane law, presumed innocent. There is therefore no Masonic reason to expel him from the Lodge before a final judgment, nor to refuse to visit him in prison. On the contrary, it is in the moments of greatest distress that Masons must show their solidarity. Visitors should transmit the Lodge's sympathy, its a priori confidence, and its help in finding a good lawyer if necessary; in short, the accused must feel morally supported. Later, should the Brother be found guilty and sentenced, nothing prevents his former mentors or peers from visiting him where he is serving his time, or from inquiring about his situation upon his release, unless his crime was particularly atrocious. It must be noted, however, that Masonic justice can be less forgiving in cases of large-scale financial delinquency revealed by the media; in such cases, the moral law of the Order often rejects the guilty party without mercy.

Finally, because the Eleemosynary is the officer who regularly visits the sick and stays informed of their health, he is in principle the first to be notified when a death occurs. He must then inform the Worshipful Master first, then the Lodge at its next meeting, and he should, if he is able, be among the Brethren present at the funeral services.

The Character of the Eleemosynary

Having reviewed the many duties of this office, we may ask what qualities are required of the Brother who would serve as the Eleemosynary. The answer emerges from the three principal functions of the officer himself.

Honesty and the Discerning Heart

From his accounting duties, the preeminent quality required is, of course, **honesty**. This virtue, which guarantees the transparency of the ledgers and leaves no room for erasures or doubt, must be equal to that of the Treasurer. In centuries past, when the Eleemosynary was often the sole decider of the relief to be distributed, the 19th-century Masonic writer François-Étienne Bazot offered timeless counsel on the character required for this station. He advised that the Lodge should, whenever possible, choose a Brother who is independent in his fortune and has the freedom of his own time.

He must be active, vigilant, a good observer, and firm of character, inaccessible to a "blind pity" that is often duped by schemers and scoundrels who would take advantage of the Craft’s inexhaustible benevolence. Yet, he must never be harsh, unapproachable, or lacking in humanity. It is better for a Lodge to stretch its means to aid one honest and indigent Mason than to give small amounts to twenty unworthy beggars who might use the widow’s mite to pay for an "obscure tavern binge." The Eleemosynary must establish a reputation for charity, but also for severity and justice. This ensures that while the truly unfortunate Brother, widow, or orphan may approach him with confidence, the incessant

and bold "Masonic mendicant" will not assail him. To this end, he should make careful inquiries into the character of those seeking relief, the causes of their misfortune, and their capacity for work.

Fraternity and the Experienced Heart

From his duties of visitation, the officer must possess psychological aptitude, humanism, and above all, an **extreme fraternity**. He must be a Brother who does not spare his time. It is for this reason that the Eleemosynary is necessarily a long-standing member of his Lodge. His experience provides him with a deep knowledge of the other members, especially the eldest, and an understanding of the subtle workings of the human mind when faced with physical pain, death, and sorrow. Consequently, it is ill-advised to elect a recently raised Master Mason to this vital office.

Masonry Made Man

In summary, the Brother who holds this office can be nothing less than a model of dedication and service. He is sensitive to the misfortunes of his peers and serves as their advocate before the committees that examine the Lodge's charitable expenses. At the same time, he remains, as Bazot advised, inflexible toward "professional" beggars. His station is not a permanent "bureau of tears," but it remains ever open to the truly poor. The Eleemosynary, in fulfilling his high and sacred mission, represents the principle, the vow, and the very goal of our fraternal institution. In him, we see Masonry made man.

If he has the time and the desire, the Eleemosynary is free, like any other officer, to present an educational paper to the Lodge, perhaps once a year. The topic could be on the nature of benevolence and Masonic solidarity, or it could simply illuminate the many activities of his own office, which are so often poorly understood. This leads to a final observation: it is surprising to see how often Eleemosynaries work in isolation from their counterparts in other Lodges. A single annual meeting or even a semi-annual newsletter among the Eleemosynaries of a district could build a fraternal cohesion from which they—and the Craft—would not be the sole beneficiaries.

The Assistant Eleemosynary

Given that the full and extensive duties of the Eleemosynary are often not detailed in official regulations, many Lodges do not appoint an assistant to this office. And yet, for a principal officer who is aware of the many tasks we have enumerated, an

Assistant Eleemosynary is a truly precious asset.

The assistant can greatly aid the work of the Lodge by taking on delegated responsibilities. He can be tasked with counting the funds from the charity box, maintaining certain registers, assisting in the process of granting relief, and conducting solidarity actions with other Lodges or community charities alongside the principal officer. He can share in the vital work of making fraternal visits and can be entrusted with the most delicate of duties, such as inquiring with the family of a deceased Brother to seek their wishes regarding the Lodge's presence at a funeral service.

In the realm of accounting, for example, the Eleemosynary might entrust his assistant with the register of charitable loans, making him responsible for monitoring the repayment schedules and signaling

when reminders for late payments are necessary. Should the assistant be approached directly with a request for aid outside the Lodge, he must transmit it to the principal officer without delay. He is bound by the same high ethical standard as his principal; he must never be overly “liberal” or “parsimonious,” for the managers of the charity fund are not administering their own property, but that of a community. It would be an odious thing to see an officer be more prodigal or more miserly with the Lodge’s funds than he is with his own.

Concerning visitations, the assistant significantly lightens the burden of the titular officer by going to see the sick, those members on leave from the Lodge, or those in mourning for a close relative. In this way, when he is called upon to replace an absent Eleemosynary during a meeting, the assistant, having been notified in advance, can arrive with all the necessary documents in hand, ready to demonstrate that he is fully “operational” and prepared to execute the duties of the office.